

Pennsylvania Animal Rabies 2017 Report

**Infectious Disease
Epidemiology**

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pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Executive Summary or Abstract

Rabies is a viral disease affecting the nervous system of mammals. Rabies is always fatal; however, vaccination is highly effective. In Pennsylvania, rabies vaccination is required for all dogs and many cats. Vaccination should also be considered for other mammalian pets and livestock. Most animals affected by rabies are wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats.¹

In the United States, rabies in humans is very rare due to effective rabies PEP vaccination and public health guidance on rabies risk. On average, about one to three human rabies cases are reported in the United States per year. The last human rabies case reported in Pennsylvania was in 1984.²

In 2017, 347 animals tested positive for rabies in Pennsylvania. Just over 50% of these animals were raccoons. Most were reported in the summer months. The counties in the southeast area of the state reported higher numbers of rabid animals than other areas of the state.

Methods

In Pennsylvania, mammals can be tested for rabies by submitting the animal specimen to a public health or agricultural laboratory in the state. Animal rabies is tested by four agency affiliations in the state. They are the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (AG), Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of Laboratories (BOL), Philadelphia Department of Public Health Laboratory (PDPH) and the Allegheny County Health Department Laboratory (ACHD). Typically, 5,000-6,000 animals are tested annually in Pennsylvania for rabies.

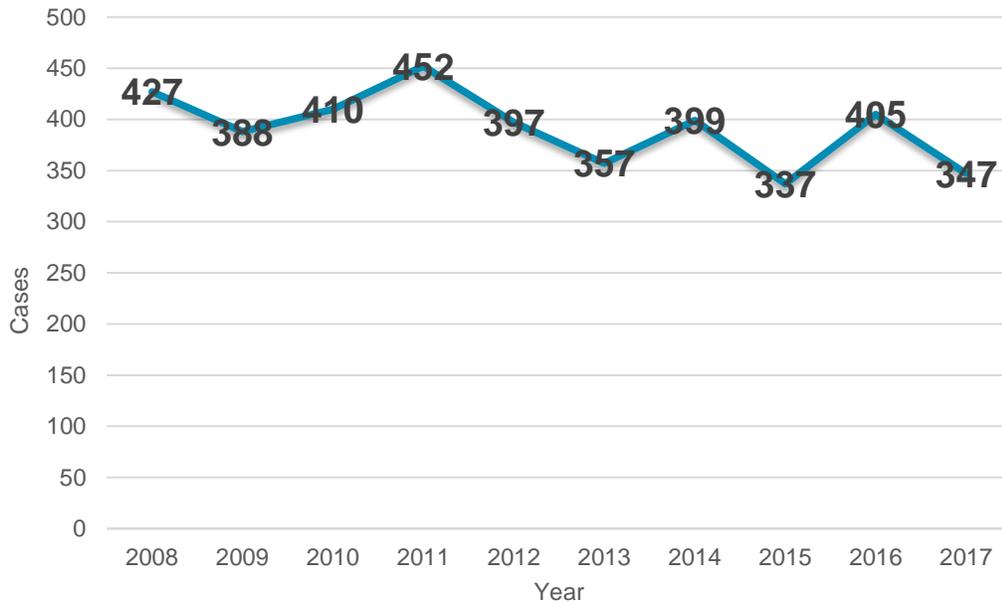
After consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) to determine if testing an animal is warranted, laboratories perform rapid testing for rabies and report results to the DOH. If an animal tests positive, community health nurses at the DOH contact the submitter to determine if a human exposure occurred. If a human exposure occurred, rabies post exposure prophylaxis vaccinations (rabies PEP) are recommended. For information on submitting animals for testing and animal exposures, see the appendix on page 12.

Data from the four rabies testing labs are entered into their respective databases and positive animals reported immediately to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the animal submitter. The positive rabies data were reviewed and a summary of animal type, location, and month are provided.

Findings

In 2017, 347 animals tested positive for rabies in Pennsylvania. This is below the 10-year average of 392 positive rabies animals per year. Figure 1 shows the number of animals testing positive per year over the last 10 years.

Figure 1 - Rabid Animals by Year, Pennsylvania, 2008-2017



Most animals in Pennsylvania are tested by the AG and BOL laboratories. Animals with a human exposure are typically tested at BOL; animals with no human exposure are typically tested at AG. Table 1 shows the laboratories at which the rabid animals were tested in Pennsylvania in 2017.

Table 1 – Rabid Animal Testing Laboratory, Pennsylvania, 2017

Laboratory	Positive Animals Tested	Percent of Positive Animals Tested (%)
ACHD	17	4.9
AG	203	58.5
BOL	112	32.3
PDPH	13	3.8
Other*	2	0.6
Total	347	100

*Other labs include the Delaware State Public Health Lab and the Maryland State Public Health Lab.

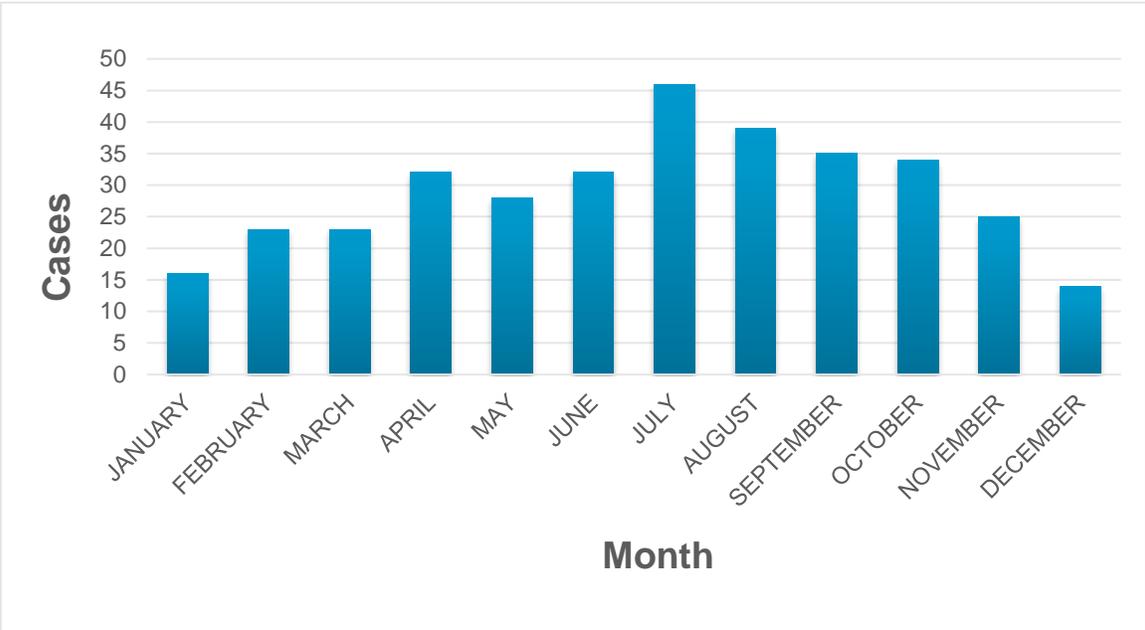
Most rabid animals in Pennsylvania are raccoons, followed by cats, bats, skunks and foxes. Several other wild and domestic animals and livestock make up the remainder of the rabid animals. Table 2 show the number of positive cases of each animal and the percent that animal represents of the total positive.

Table 2 – Rabid Animal by Species, Pennsylvania, 2017

Animal	Positive Cases	Percent of Total Positive (%)
BAT	39	11.2
CAT	62	17.9
COW	3	0.9
COYOTE	1	0.3
DOG	2	0.6
FOX	25	7.2
GROUNDHOG	5	1.4
HORSE	2	0.6
RACCOON	176	50.7
SKUNK	32	9.2
TOTAL	347	100.0

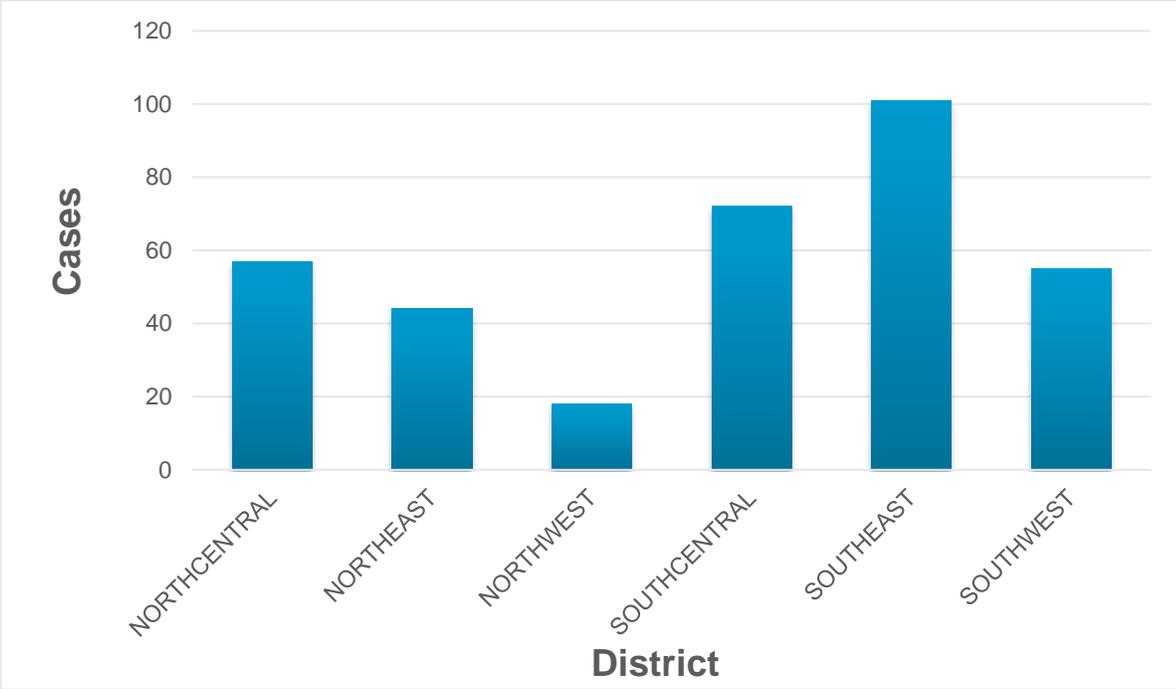
Rabid animals are identified year-round in Pennsylvania; however, the reports of rabid animals tend to increase in the warmer months as animals and people spend more time outdoors and encounters with rabid animals are more likely to occur. Figure 2 shows the months in which rabid animals were identified in 2017.

Figure 2 – Rabid Animal by Species, Pennsylvania, 2017



Counties in the southeast and southcentral areas of the state tend to receive the most reports of rabid animals. In 2017, Lancaster county in the southeast area of the state reported more rabid animals than any other county with 19 positive animals. Centre (18), Chester (17); Allegheny, Philadelphia and York counties followed, all reporting 15 rabid animals each. Map 1 shows the county distribution of rabies cases in 2017.

Figure 3 – Animal Rabies Cases by District, Pennsylvania, 2017



Citations

¹ CDC. “Rabies.” Last modified September 28, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html>

² CDC. “Human Rabies.” Last modified August 23, 2017.
https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/location/usa/surveillance/human_rabies.html

Appendix A

For questions on this report and other rabies data inquiries, please contact Leah Lind at llind@pa.gov or 570-826-2062.

For a possible animal exposure:

If you or a family member is concerned about an **exposure to an animal** and believe you may need rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (rabies vaccine), please call [877-PA HEALTH \(877-724-3258\)](tel:877-PA-HEALTH). You will receive a response promptly from public health staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Exposures to rabid animals are an urgent concern and should be addressed as soon as possible.

To submit an animal for testing please contact the following:

For animals with no human exposure: Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, contact your [regional office](#) to obtain information on submitting an animal for testing.

For animals with human exposure: Pennsylvania Department of Health, Bureau of Laboratories, [Rabies Testing](#).

Allegheny County residents:

Allegheny County Department of Laboratories
3441 Forbes Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
412-578-8070

Philadelphia residents:

Philadelphia Department of Health Laboratory
500 South Broad St.
Philadelphia, PA 19170
215-685-6740 or 215-685-6748